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UNCLAS ISTANBUL 000894

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [TK](#)

SUBJECT: AKP ISTANBUL CONGRESS: "MUEZZINOGLU RELOADED"

¶1. (U) Justice and Development (AK) Party Chairman and Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan headlined the June 22 AK Istanbul Congress. There were no surprises (in fact, no challengers at all) in the reelection of Istanbul Chairman Mehmet Muezzinoglu, and Erdogan's unscripted speech focused on predictably populist themes that would resonate with the 10,000 party faithful and luminaries in the audience:

- Education: promised free textbooks and private-school vouchers for 10,000 students;
- Energy: promised new dams and cheaper electricity;
- Foreign Policy: promised to push forward with EU membership;
- Party Ideology: reaffirmed that AKP is a conservative democratic party that is open to all (i.e., headscarved or not) and committed to Ataturk's secularist principles.

¶2. (U) Erdogan also made news by remarking that he would soon reveal estimates on the staggering extent of corruption in Turkey. He warned the labor unions not to make unreasonable demands and cautioned all of his supporters not to expect the economic situation to improve immediately (i.e, give us at least 3 years). In an indirect reference to Young Party (GP) Chairman Cem Uzan's verbal attacks and subsequent legal charges against him, Erdogan said that he was content to let the courts handle the issue. Following his speech, Erdogan welcomed a few dozen new members into the party, most of whom had defected from local positions in the Motherland Party (ANAP), including Bahcelievler Mayor Saffet Bulut.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: Erdogan's speech was a further demonstration of his political talent, charismatic appeal, and keen understanding of his constituents. Clearly his die-hard Istanbul supporters are willing to give him and his government time to make their mark, but it remains to be seen whether the wider AK support base will be as patient.

ARNETT